Ontario

STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

Working Together for Success...

And Achieving It

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

BETTER HEALTH

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

Update 2006

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STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

Working Together for Success...
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ONTARIO'S RURAL PLAN
FEBRUARY 2006 UPDATE

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
www.omafra.gov.on.ca

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ontario places a high value on rural Ontario and its contribution to our quality of life. We know that our rural communities are key to the health and vitality of the province. We know just how much our economy relies on our agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing sectors.

That's why, in November 2004, the Government of Ontario introduced its Rural Plan, *Strong Rural Communities: Working Together for Success*.

The Rural Plan recognizes that a full range of issues face rural Ontario, and that these issues can be addressed through a coordinated, interconnected strategy.

The Rural Plan recognizes the diversity of rural communities – ranging from smaller centres near major cities to small towns and villages, First Nations communities and remote locations in the North. Community and economic development strategies have to reflect these regional variations and diverse needs.

People with the greatest understanding of both the challenges and the opportunities facing rural communities – the people who live and work in those communities – have been involved in not only the development of this plan but also its implementation.

The Government of Ontario has identified three priorities:

- **Strong People, Strong Economy**
- **Better Health**
- **Success for Students**

Twenty-five per cent of Canada's rural and small town population resides in Ontario.

Moving forward with our Rural Plan ensures that all of Ontario will benefit and prosper as the government acts on those priorities.

Together, we confirmed the key factors that make a rural community strong:

- A population large enough to sustain local economies and community services
- Reliable access to health-care services
- Quality education located close to home
- Up-to-date and well-maintained infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, water, wastewater and waste management facilities, hospitals, schools, cultural resources) that supports economic prosperity, public safety and a high quality of life
- Diversified economies that provide a range of employment opportunities including well-paying, highly skilled jobs
- Clean and healthy natural environments that support public health and safety, economic activity and a high quality of life

- Respect for biodiversity and the protection of natural heritage for future generations
- Active community participation and the leadership necessary to build on community strengths
- Cultural and social services that promote diversity and vitality.

The Rural Plan sets out specific goals in each of these areas and identifies the best strategies to reach those targets and realize our vision for rural Ontario.

That vision? Strong, healthy, prosperous communities that can overcome challenges, build upon their strengths and recognize and seize new opportunities.

We knew that to be successful, this plan, which was developed in partnership by government and rural residents from all walks of life and all types of communities, would also have to be implemented in partnership with communities, agencies, First Nations and various levels of government.

Now, a little more than one year after launching Ontario's Rural Plan, we're pleased to provide this update on our progress.

While we recognize that there is still more to do, we are well on our way to building stronger, more vital rural communities. And we're doing it together.

STRONG PEOPLE, STRONG ECONOMY

This government has a plan to strengthen our province, and boost its prosperity, by supporting our most important competitive advantage – our people.

Skilled people, backed by sound infrastructure and a solid foundation of research and innovation, can create and take advantage of competitive business environments. This is key to building and diversifying rural economies. By promoting local prosperity, quality communities and supporting a higher quality of life for residents, these robust rural economies attract and retain investment and provide a range of employment opportunities, as well as social, cultural, tourism and recreational facilities and services. These, in turn, attract new residents with new skills.

Successful partnerships result in local success stories. Businesses become more profitable. The goods and services that are produced are second to none. Aggressive marketing and information technology captures more market share at home and in other countries.

New opportunities are created when people work together for the benefit of their communities.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We know that strong economies attract and retain investment, bring in new residents and provide stable employment as well as social, cultural, tourism and recreational facilities and services.

Almost three-quarters of rural Ontario businesses employ fewer than 10 people. Small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario make a big impact in terms of economic growth and jobs in our province.

Rural communities can employ a variety of economic development strategies to revitalize and diversify their economies: business retention and expansion initiatives, export development, marketing the community to small manufacturers, downtown or waterfront revitalization, redeveloping brownfields, investing in cultural resources, developing tourism opportunities or preserving historical sites.

The approach may vary, but the most successful economic development initiatives are conceived and implemented from the "bottom up." That's because those who live and work in a community know best its unique characteristics, its strengths and its potential.

By working with other levels of government, rural communities and local businesses, we are all reaping the benefits of economic development, diversification and innovation.

GOAL:
Local economies that are diversified, innovative and support well-paying, high quality jobs.

STRATEGIES:

- → Support community revitalization
- → Promote economic development in Northern Ontario and Aboriginal communities

→ Promote diversification and strengthen innovation capacity

→ Encourage sustainable resource-based industries including economically viable agriculture, mining and forestry sectors

→ Promote sustainable resource use and maximize the potential of tourism as an economic driver.

OUR PROGRESS:

The Rural Economic Development (RED) Program helps rural communities remove barriers to community development and economic growth. RED's priorities are revitalized communities, improved access to health-care services and improved access to skills development and enhancement opportunities.

- Invested more than $8.5 million, since fall 2004, in 38 projects that focus on community revitalization through the RED Program.
- Partnered with 11 communities to test Downtown Market Analysis Tools. This package of six resources helps communities to understand what is happening in their downtowns. The pilot experience will be used to develop a new package of tools, expected to be available in mid-2006.
- Delivered $665,711 in support for cultural tourism initiatives in rural areas through 16 projects as part of the government's Cultural Tourism Marketing Fund. The fund was one of a group of special programs designed to respond to the unique challenges that Ontario's tourism and cultural organizations face.
- As part of the government's Northern Prosperity Plan, launched the GO North Investor Program, designed to attract major investors from outside Ontario. Over the coming year, $5 million will be invested to promote Northern Ontario to the world.

ASSABASKA SHORELINE SETTLEMENT

This settlement agreement calls for the mainland portion of the Lake of the Woods Provincial Park to become a reserve held jointly by the Big Grassy River First Nation and the Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation. The First Nations agree to continue to offer park services to the public for so long as it is economically viable. In addition to the land to be provided under the settlement, the First Nations will receive $1,565,000 from the province. This settlement will help the First Nations become economically strong, independent and self-reliant and contribute to a positive and stable climate for investment.

The Northern Ontario Grow Bonds pilot project provides loans to small and medium-sized businesses in the North, to attract new and retain existing investment, and create jobs in Northern Ontario.

- The Northern Ontario Grow Bonds pilot project generated approximately $13 million through the sale of bonds to Northerners.
- Committed to a five-year, $680-million investment to foster a new generation of forest sector jobs. This includes $330-million in loan guarantees and a $150 million Forest Sector Prosperity Fund to leverage new capital investments. $28 million will be provided annually to maintain primary forest access roads. An additional $10 million annual investment will enhance the Forest Resource Inventory, to ensure the long-term sustainability of Ontario's wood supply.

DELHI INNOVATION TEAM

Community volunteers and Norfolk County staff worked with provincial staff to develop the Delhi Innovation Team project. The Innovation Team identified actions for local economic development opportunities in Delhi's downtown core. The community and the County are ready to implement the team's recommendations, which include actions such as brownfield redevelopment and developing tourism opportunities.

An Innovation Team is a group of up to five people with expertise in addressing economic development issues identified by a community. The team focuses on facilitating solutions that address the community's barriers to sustainable growth.

- Invested $15 million in a three-year geological mapping initiative to provide information about geological and mineral resource potential in targeted areas of the province's Far North. Providing new geological information will lay a foundation for economic development opportunities that strengthen northern communities.
- Provided an estimated $312 million to the horseracing industry in rural communities across Ontario through Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation revenues.
- Delivered $84 million to help the cattle and related industries recover from BSE and $174 million to assist grain and oilseed producers to address financial difficulties caused by poor growing conditions and unfairly subsidized competition.
- Committed to invest $172 million over three years to stabilize farm incomes, through the Business Risk Management programs of the Agricultural Policy Framework.
- Invested more than $913,000 since the fall of 2004 to support the provision of veterinary services to livestock producers across under-serviced areas of Ontario through the Veterinary Assistance Program.
- Developed apprenticeship training standards for a number of occupations relating to agriculture.
- Strengthened the Ontario Heritage Act to enable municipalities to identify and protect property of cultural heritage value or interest. An integrated approach to cultural, economic and land-use planning leads to the revitalization of main streets, neighbourhoods and individual properties. It will help create employment, encourage new business, bring tourist dollars and can even increase property values.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COMMUNITY EXCHANGE – SEAFORTH AND PETROLIA

In February 2005, the towns of Seaforth and Petrolia were the first communities to pilot the First Impressions Community Exchange Program, which helps communities better understand the first impression they make to visitors, including tourists, potential investors and new residents. When Petrolia presented its report to Seaforth, the municipal council approved funds to support some of the recommendations in the report. A total of 22 communities have been involved in 11 community exchanges.

"Many retailers in a small town like Seaforth don't get much opportunity to see other towns and how retailers offer their services to other towns. And when we had feedback from Petrolia, a town very much like this, with the same kind of retailing, it was positive feedback and businesses felt better for their offerings and how they presented themselves."
Ralph Laviolette, Economic Development Officer, Huron East

STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Ontario's Rural Plan recognizes the importance of fostering strong local leadership, of making sure the capacity to engage in successful economic development exists in rural communities.

That's why we will not only provide the right tools, but also help the people in rural Ontario use those tools by building on their skills.

GOAL:
The capacity to develop vibrant local economies through strong leadership.

STRATEGIES:

→ Provide tools and resources to build local community and economic development capacity

→ Provide employment opportunities and leadership development to youth in rural areas

→ Build the capacity of the voluntary sector

→ Provide support to municipal staff and enhance the fiscal capacity of municipalities.

OUR PROGRESS:

- Helped more than 4,000 eligible students in southern Ontario gain valuable work experience and enhance their work skills through the Rural Summer Jobs Service Program. By investing more than $2.8 million in 2005, we helped students aged 15 to 24 to find jobs in rural Ontario.
- In Northern Ontario, the Summer Jobs Service Program assists more than 4,000 students annually to gain valuable work experience with over 1,600 employers.
- Provided over 2,000 opportunities for youth aged 15 to 24, new postsecondary graduates and professionals through the Youth Employment Program, which offers a unique combination of work, learning and skills development focusing on resource management.
- Launched the Northern Ontario Youth Internship and Co-op program to help young northerners make the transition from school to work. In addition, the Northern Ontario Young Entrepreneur Program provides young entrepreneurs the opportunity to develop business skills while assisting them to start their own enterprises in the North.
- Refocused the NOHFC with six new programs to provide new opportunities to youth, young entrepreneurs, business owners, communities, public-private partnerships and others across the North. These programs include Enterprises North Job Creation Program, Northern Ontario Young Entrepreneur Program, Northern Ontario Youth Internship and Co-op Program, Infrastructure and Community Development Program, Assistance Supporting Emerging Technology Projects in Northern Ontario, and the Small Business Energy Conservation Program.
- Provided opportunities for students to participate through cooperative education placements in apprenticeship trades, while completing an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.

The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) works with northern entrepreneurs, companies and business organizations while continuing to support vital infrastructure and community development projects that enhance quality of life and stimulate economic activity.

BR+E

The Township of Gravenhurst and Muskoka Community Futures Development Corporation received $15,220 through the RED Program to implement a BR+E project which will enhance working relationships between the town and local businesses, identify ways to support local businesses, establish a strategic action plan for economic development and create skills training opportunities for youth.

The Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) program is an internationally recognized community economic development tool that works to improve the local business climate by evaluating and addressing the needs and concerns of local businesses, thereby saving jobs and creating new ones.

- Launched a web-based BR+E resource customized for rural communities. More than 50 communities have signed up for this web-based application since June 2005.
- Boosted science awareness among Ontario's young people, through the Youth Science and Technology Outreach program, a $3 million, three-year investment. One of the program's main objectives is to engage youth, with an emphasis on young people in rural, remote and underserviced communities.
- Committed to provide $2.1 million over three years to 4-H Ontario to enable the organization to continue its important work in developing the skills of rural youth.
- Introduced new Youth Partnerships grants to facilitate the development of an enterprising culture amongst Ontario's youth by providing them with educational and entrepreneurial opportunities and programs. Programs will have an emphasis on reaching youth who are under-served, outside the mainstream educational system and living in rural and remote communities across Ontario.
- Provided hands-on business training and mentoring – together with awards of up to $3,000 – to help students start up and run their own summer businesses through the Summer Company program. In 2005, approximately 170 student businesses – 60 per cent of the Summer Companies – were created in rural Ontario.
- Hosted "Beyond the City Lights" rural tourism conferences in seven rural locations across the province. The workshops focused on topics such as Partnering for Success, Marketing Your Business, Shoulder Season Diversification and Customer Service. More than 750 delegates attended the sessions in March and April, 2005.
- Supported rural Ontario municipalities with an estimated $41 million in payments for local infrastructure and services through Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation revenues.
- Provided $249 million to rural and northern municipalities through the Northern and Rural Communities Grant of OMPF. An additional $58 million will help rural communities better support policing costs.

The Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) is the province's main transfer payment to municipalities. The OMPF will provide $707 million in 2006. This grant assists municipalities with their share of social program costs; includes equalization measures for areas with limited property assessment; addresses challenges faced by northern and rural communities; and responds to rural policing costs.

A SKILLED WORKFORCE

A skilled labour force is an essential component of all competitive and strong economies. It is key to the growth and expansion of local businesses, and ultimately, the success of the local economy.

Rural communities that can offer a range of employment opportunities that include well-paying, highly-skilled jobs not only encourage people – especially young people – to remain in rural Ontario, but also attract new residents and new investments.

GOAL:
Skilled workers able to take advantage of diverse employment opportunities.

STRATEGY:
→ Invest in skills development.

OUR PROGRESS:
- Created a new $95 million Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit to encourage Ontario businesses to hire and train apprentices in skilled trades. Small businesses with payrolls under $400,000 are entitled to an enhanced tax credit rate of 30 per cent and there's a 25 per cent credit rate for larger corporations. Ontario is also on target to increase new registrants for apprenticeships by 7,000 annually, reaching a total of 26,000 by 2007-08.

GRAND ERIE APPRENTICESHIP INFORMATION SESSIONS

The government held Employer Apprenticeship Information sessions in three communities (Simcoe, Brantford and Cayuga) in partnership with regional partners such as the Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board, Community Futures Development Corporations, manufacturing associations, the local school board and provincial ministries. Eighty people attended the sessions to develop a regional awareness and marketing strategy to enable businesses and communities to attract and retain the human resources they need for sustained development.

- Invested $3.8 million to create 216 internships and work placements, to provide on-the-job-training for northern youth, through the NOHFC's Northern Ontario Youth Internship and Co-op Program.
- Invested $20 million through the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund, to update apprenticeship training facilities and equipment at 24 colleges of applied arts and technology. Another $6.2 million will assist more than 600 experienced workers to develop their skills through the Pre-Apprenticeship Program, and be eligible to become apprentices.

- Signed the Superior Forest Agreement, forming a partnership with the Missanabie Cree First Nation and Tembec to help build a better future for Aboriginal young people. This will provide mentoring opportunities for members of the Missanabie Cree First Nation to gain training on forest management planning, regulatory requirements and forest technology.
- Invested almost $6 million in nine skills training projects through the RED Program since fall 2004.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN QUINTE

Through the RED program, the government partnered with the Quinte Economic Development Commission, the Trenval Business Development Corporation and the Quinte Manufacturer's Association of the Quinte Industrial Corporation to address a lack of skilled labour. The project will improve the ability of local businesses to compete by increasing student awareness of careers in technical and skilled trades, providing internship opportunities and offering customized training. The government invested over $1 million.

MODERNIZED INFRASTRUCTURE

Well-maintained infrastructure is critical to every element of our lives.

Clean drinking water and the effective management of water and wastewater systems are essential to public health in all communities across Ontario.

Sound roads and bridges provide important regional links and are vital not only for our safety, but also for economic development and growth.

Cultural, recreational and tourism facilities can boost local economies, create jobs, increase community safety, enhance education, engage youth and add to the quality of life in our communities.

Because this government values public health and safety, a high quality of life and economic prosperity, we're working with our partners to upgrade this province's infrastructure.

GOAL:
Up-to-date and well-maintained infrastructure.

STRATEGIES:
- → Improve water quality and upgrade sewage treatment and waste management infrastructure
- → Improve local roads and bridges
- → Improve northern highways
- → Provide municipalities with innovative financing tools to help fund infrastructure projects
- → Repair and improve arts, culture, sports and recreation infrastructure
- → Improve access to affordable housing.

OUR PROGRESS:
- Announced investments of approximately $125 million in 120 rural communities to enhance and renew Ontario's public infrastructure, following the first intake of applications under COMRIF. Through COMRIF, 35 water and wastewater projects were approved in 30 municipalities and 177 road and bridge projects were approved in 87 municipalities.

The governments of Canada and Ontario are each investing up to $298 million over five years to improve public infrastructure in small urban and rural municipalities throughout the province. With municipal contributions, the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF) is expected to stimulate up to $900 million in infrastructure investments.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) supports the building of healthy and vibrant communities through community-based initiatives that strengthen the capacity of organizations in the arts and culture, environment, human and social services, and sports and recreation sectors.

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE TOWNSHIP OF CLEARVIEW

The governments of Ontario and Canada each invested up to $81,250 under COMRIF in a municipal water infrastructure upgrade project in the communities of Avening, Brentwood, Dunedin, Singhampton and Sunnidale. The work includes water treatment upgrades in the community halls and fire halls. The Township of Clearview will contribute the balance of the total eligible project cost of up to $243,750.

"We are eager to proceed with these vital improvements to our water system to ensure a safe and healthy community for our residents." Fran Sainsbury, Mayor, Township of Clearview

- Invested $54.7 million through the OTF in operating and project grants to communities of 20,000 people or less. The grants will strengthen the capacity of the voluntary sector, through investments in community-based initiatives. $29.3 million went to support initiatives in the arts and culture sector and human and social services sector. The grants were awarded in recognition that the voluntary sector plays a critical role in building healthy and vibrant communities.

TYRCONNELL HERITAGE SOCIETY

The organization was awarded $37,400 through the OTF to assist in the interior restoration of an important heritage site located in Wallacetown. Due to the success of the restoration, the organization has provided employment for three students for the last three years, and is planning to hire a curator who will assist the Society in achieving provincial museum standards. In 2005, they attracted 2,285 visitors, provided an education day for 800 elementary students and produced a War of 1812 Reenactment that drew 400 people.

- Supported the acquisition of broadband telecommunications for public internet access at 150 rural Ontario public library locations, including 14 First Nation public libraries. Ninety-nine per cent of Ontario's 1,114 public libraries and First Nation public libraries now provide public internet access services.
- Invested $3.9 million in the construction of the new accommodations at the Greenstone Forest Fire Management Headquarters and $2.4 million in a new state-of-the-art fire management facility in Chapleau, to make northern communities safer and stronger. The projects are part of ReNew Ontario.

ReNew Ontario is a strategic five-year infrastructure investment plan. The government and its partners will invest more than $30 billion in public infrastructure in Ontario to support health-care, education and economic prosperity.

- Introduced the Northern Ontario Highways Strategy, a $1.8 billion, five-year plan that will increase infrastructure investment in the North by almost 40 per cent. Of the funds, more than $1 billion will be invested in repair and upkeep of nearly 200 bridges and more than 2,000 kilometres of highway. The remaining funds will be used to expand northern highways, adding 54 new bridges and 62 kilometres of new roadway.
- Introduced the new Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program, which makes up to $6 million a year available to assist municipalities and farmers with the costs of drain construction, improvement and maintenance.
- Contributed $3.5 million to the winter roads program to assist Far North First Nations build temporary roads over frozen lakes, rivers and ground, connecting 31 communities that are accessible only by air or water in other seasons.
- Provided affordable infrastructure financing to 36 municipalities through the second round of the Infrastructure Renewal Loan Program, available through OSIFA. To date, OSIFA has committed to provide more than $1.24 billion in financing to more than 150 of Ontario's rural municipalities for more than 580 local infrastructure projects.

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN LANARK HIGHLANDS

In Lanark Highlands, more than three quarters of the 512 kilometres of roads in the township are gravel. Paving was made possible through OSIFA. The Township borrowed $1.94 million, at a rate about one per cent lower than the bank's best rate. Based on the difference in the cost of maintaining paved and gravel roads, it is estimated that the paved roads will pay for themselves in 10 years.

"We were always getting complaints about the gravel roads and their condition. Those complaints have dropped off significantly as a result of this project. That rate makes a big difference in a municipality like ours when this much money is involved. It helped to get the work done while keeping costs as low as we possibly could." Robert Bunker, Treasurer, Township of Lanark Highlands

- Announced 289 affordable housing units in rural areas through the Affordable Housing Program's Community Rental Program.
- Allocated $30 million of the $602-million Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program for repairs, renovation or construction of homes and affordable rental units in Northern Ontario.

RUDY H. BROWN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE AT RIDGETOWN COLLEGE

The government invested a total of $3.5 million, toward the completion of the state-of-the-art Rudy H. Brown Rural Development Centre at Ridgetown College. This complements the efforts of the Ridgetown College Agri-Food Foundation, which raised half of the total funding needed for the project. When complete, the centre will include classrooms, a lecture theatre, office and administration space to accommodate the college's increasing enrolment, while newly created community space will be used to host local events.

The Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority (OSIFA) offers low-cost and longer-term financing to assist Ontario municipalities, universities and other broader public sector partners to finance priorities such as clean water, sewage and waste management infrastructure, roads and bridges, public transit, social housing, long-term care homes and culture, tourism and recreation projects.

BETTER HEALTH

This government believes that every Ontarian deserves to live in a healthy community.

And we know that improving the health of our communities – and their residents – requires more than providing greater access to health care. It's also about enhancing our natural environment. About providing a variety of recreational and cultural opportunities. About creating a sense of security, and a feeling of belonging.

Healthy communities are those which residents are proud to call home.

Our Rural Plan takes into account all of these factors. That's why this government is working with the health-care community to provide more accessible services. That's why we're working with municipal and community leaders to encourage healthy lifestyles and improve public safety. That's why we're working with farmers, foresters, miners, communities and businesses to better protect our water and air and make sound land-use decisions.

BETTER ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

A strong community protects the health of its residents and promotes healthy lifestyles. To improve the health-care services available to rural residents, we've developed a variety of innovative health-care delivery models in partnership with the health-care community and rural municipalities.

GOAL:
Improved access to health-care services.

STRATEGIES:
- → Increase the number of health-care professionals in rural areas
- → Increase access to primary health care by enrolling more Ontarians in Family Health Teams
- → Improve access to health-care services that reflect the needs of rural communities
- → Invest in the infrastructure of health-care facilities.

OUR PROGRESS:
- Established the new Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM), which opened to 56 students in September 2005. More than three-quarters (78 per cent) of these students have lived in Northern Ontario for at least 10 years; 11 per cent of the students are Aboriginal; and, 18 per cent are francophone. As part of their curriculum, students are required to do clinical placements in smaller rural northern communities.
- Provided $32.9 million in capital funding and $67.5 million over the last five years towards the development of the NOSM, with campuses in Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

- Helped students studying in our northern, rural and remote communities defray the costs associated with attending medical school by committing up to $2.5 million in matching funds, through the NOHFC, to the NOSM Bursary Fund.

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Through the RED Program, the government provided $160,800 to the Canadian Mental Health Association, Cochrane Temiskaming Branch, and its partners, Cochrane District Community Care Access Centre and Northern College of Applied Arts and Technology Job Connect, to expand mental health services in northern communities. The project will assist in increasing the number of health-care practitioners serving northern communities by creating a dedicated telecommunications network. This integrated health-care system will help reduce geographical barriers and increase access to health-care services.

"This project will help us build stronger remote northern communities by reducing geographical barriers, increasing access to health-care services and enhancing the quality of life for people receiving health supports." Judy Shanks, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Mental Health Association, Cochrane Temiskaming Branch

- Committed close to $2 million for eight approved projects aimed at increasing access to health-care services under the RED Program since fall 2004
- Boosted the level of health-care services in those communities designated as underserviced through the Underserviced Area Program (UAP). The UAP comprises 18 integrated initiatives to provide "one-stop-shopping" for communities looking for support to access health-care services and recruitment of health-care professionals along the entire continuum of care. Between April 1, 2004 and March 31, 2005, UAP helped underserviced communities recruit over 200 health-care professionals.
- Committed to create 150 FHTs by March 31, 2007, which will provide comprehensive health-care services to more than 2.5 million Ontarians.
- Improved access to health care for those rural residents who cannot necessarily get to a clinic or a hospital by providing $9.5 million in telemedicine to bring health care to rural and northern communities. To date, this funding has supported over 16,000 clinical telemedicine consultations to more than 12,000 people in rural and northern communities.
- Improved access to air ambulance services in the North by better coordinating all aspects of Ontario's Air Ambulance Services with the appointment of a new organization – the Ontario Air Ambulance Service Corporation.

Family Health Teams (FHTs) will provide primary health care, and some will include teams of interdisciplinary health providers of physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, mental health workers and others working together to provide services.

CNIB EYE VAN

The government is helping bring comprehensive eye care to northerners in remote areas by investing in upgrades to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's (CNIB) specialized mobile eye care clinic. The NOHFC is providing $141,000 to update this mobile eye care clinic. Each year, the CNIB Eye Van visits 30 rural Northern communities, serving more than 5,000 northerners and traveling more than 6,000 kilometres.

- Designated a new district stroke centre at Huntsville District Memorial Hospital and five new stroke prevention clinics in Barrie, Brantford, Sarnia, Hamilton and Hawkesbury and provided $977,500 to assist the centres in establishing services across their regions.

NEW CANCER TREATMENT CENTRE IN BARRIE

A new, state-of-the-art cancer treatment centre at Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital will bring residents from a large geographical area (including Barrie, Simcoe, Muskoka and Parry Sound regions) improved access to quality treatment. The government has also committed to the first phase of the hospital expansion around the new Cancer Care Centre. When construction of the treatment centre and hospital expansion has been completed, the new facility will be publicly owned, controlled and accountable. Construction is scheduled to start in 2008-09.

- Supported the implementation of 22 new dialysis treatment systems in 2004-05 by providing $1.64 million in capital funding assistance and $781,000 in one-time funding, through the Chronic Kidney Disease Program. These stations are located in rural Ontario at the following centres: Sarnia, Sioux Lookout, Pembroke, Grand River and North Wellington.
- Created 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) across the province to plan, integrate and fund the delivery of health-care services. These networks will allow local communities and health-care providers to work together to identify local priorities, plan local health services and deliver them in a more coordinated fashion.
- Investing in 22 new CHCs and 17 new satellite CHCs across the province. This includes 17 CHCs and seven new satellite CHCs serving rural communities to provide access to primary health care and community health programs. This is the largest ever expansion of Ontario's CHC system. In addition to the new centres, existing centres across the province will receive extra funding for staffing and program enhancements.

Community Health Centres (CHCs) are non-profit organizations that contribute to the development of healthy communities by providing education and advice that assist individuals, families and communities to strengthen their capacity to take more responsibility for their health and well-being.

HEALTHY LIVING

Better health is about more than improved access to services. It is also about safeguarding public health and protecting the environment and encouraging Ontarians to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

GOAL:

Communities that promote healthy living and protect public health and the environment.

STRATEGIES:

→ Build community partnerships with law enforcement officials to develop local crime prevention strategies.

→ Develop strategies for reducing tobacco use, preventing obesity and increasing physical activity.

→ Provide tools and resources to rural communities to meet government policies and regulations

→ Support alternative and renewable energy opportunities.

OUR PROGRESS:

- Provided more than $148,000 to 11 rural communities to assist them with their crime prevention and community safety efforts, through the Safer Communities Grant Programs.
- Provided funding through the Safer Communities – 1,000 Officers Partnership Program. Sixty police officer positions, funded to a cap of $70,000 per officer per year, were reserved for northern and First Nations communities. Officers were allocated as part of the government's plan to foster safer and stronger communities in Ontario.
- Established the Tobacco Community Transition Fund to help communities in Ontario's tobacco growing regions diversify their economies and assist tobacco growers to exit the industry. The Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board received $35 million and assisted more than 250 growers to make the transition away from tobacco. Local Community Futures Development Corporations will administer $15 million to encourage long-term, sustainable economic development.
- Provided $19 million in operating and project grants to sports and recreation projects in communities of 20,000 or less, through the OTF. The result will be healthier, more physically active Ontarians.
- Provided $6.4 million in funding to projects in communities of 20,000 or less through the OTF to support community-based initiatives that strengthen the capacity of organizations in the environment sector.
- Developed the Healthy and Active Living Strategy that focuses on:
  - Promoting the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity to health and wellness
  - Creating healthier communities by influencing the factors that affect health
  - Reducing the barriers to healthy eating choices and opportunities for physical activity
  - Targeting children and youth and communities, including at-risk populations such as Aboriginal peoples and northern Ontarians
  - Engaging partners.
- Introduced a comprehensive new strategy, ACTIVE2010, to increase levels of physical activity among Ontarians. This initiative includes the Ontario Trails Strategy to assist in the planning, managing, and promoting of trails in Ontario.

REDUCED-RISK APPLE INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT IN SIMCOE

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture was awarded $27,200 through the OTF to pilot the use of reduced risk pesticides in the local apple industry in the Simcoe area. Six growers participated in the pilot project and the results were shared through meetings, publications and media. This was an innovative project that allowed "early adopters" of cutting edge technology to demonstrate that pesticide alternatives actually worked and thereby to convince others in the industry to adopt the environmentally beneficial approaches.

- Introduced changes to the Nutrient Management regulation that will provide farmers with greater flexibility in the development of nutrient management plans and strategies. The regulation will protect our streams and wells through the development of risk-based standards for the construction and placement of manure storage facilities.

WASTE MANAGEMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY IN STE-ANNE-DE-PRESCOTT

Through the RED Program, the government is contributing $31,180 to a project led by the village of Ste-Anne-de-Prescott and its partner the Township of East Hawkesbury. The project will establish a business case for the construction of a manure and biosolids digester that would address the village's need for anaerobic digester technology. The project will also determine the feasibility of constructing a greenhouse that would use the methane gas emissions from the digester as green, renewable energy.

"Using manure to produce electricity is good for the environment and good for the economy. The concept supports local family farms through a form of joint ownership. This approach has never been studied before and the government's assistance is making it possible." David Sherwood, Coordinator, Economic Development Committee of Ste-Anne-de-Prescott

- Provided a total of $23.7 million to assist farmers to make environmental improvements to their operations and meet the requirements of the Nutrient Management Act.
- Committed to providing $67.5 million to assist communities to protect Ontario's drinking water: $51 million over five years for technical studies to ensure municipalities and others have the scientific information they need to support their water protection efforts and $16.5 million over the next year for Conservation Authorities, for staff and resources to work with local communities to develop source protection plans.
- Invested $12.5 million in new research to help ensure that everyone has the information necessary to move forward with source water protection.
- Made the rules for drinking water more workable for owners of small and rural water systems by introducing Regulation 252/05 for systems serving non-residential and seasonal residential uses. The new regulation reduces the financial burden on owners while maintaining a high level of public health protection.

Regulation 252/05 is the first step in the government's proposed move to make public health units responsible by 2007 for ensuring facilities such as churches, community halls, bed and breakfasts and tourist outfitters have safe drinking water.

WALKERTON CLEAN WATER CENTRE

The Walkerton Clean Water Centre was created to help ensure training is available and accessible to water system operators in rural and remote communities and to determine the long-term needs of water systems operations. The agency helps water systems operators across the province to meet Ontario's tough certification and training. It receives $5 million in funding annually.

- Introduced the 12-year, $520-million Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund to encourage domestic production of the ethanol required to meet the RFS. The fund will provide both capital and operating assistance.
- Created an online, interactive map that identifies areas of the province with wind power potential. The Wind Energy Atlas is a prospecting tool that will help users assess the feasibility of a site for wind energy projects.

The Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) requires that gasoline sold in Ontario contain an average of five per cent ethanol beginning in 2007.

- Approved another nine renewable energy projects – including eight new wind farms and one waterpower project – that will provide Ontario with 975 megawatts of clean, green power and an estimated $2 billion in new investment. This will bring our total renewable energy capacity to 1,370 megawatts – and put us more than half-way to our target of 2,700 megawatts by 2010.

WOLFE ISLAND WIND POWER PROJECT

The 197.8 megawatt Wolfe Island Wind Power Project will consist of eighty-six 2.3 megawatt wind turbines, located on Wolfe Island, near Kingston. It will generate enough power for 75,000 households (more than the Kingston metropolitan area). This project is scheduled to commence in the spring of 2007 and is expected to be completed by October 2008.

SOUND LAND-USE PLANNING

The protection of our natural environment is central to our good health. Clean water, fresh air, healthy ecosystems, attractive landscapes and the protection and conservation of cultural heritage resources in our rural communities help to ensure public health and safety, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

GOAL:

The capacity to make planning decisions that balance ecosystem health, social well-being and economic activity.

STRATEGIES:

→ Develop tools and resources to implement planning reforms

→ Strengthen the province's agricultural sector by acting on advice from the Agricultural Advisory Team.

OUR PROGRESS:

- Protected 1.8 million acres of prime agricultural lands, tender fruits lands, watersheds, rivers and forests by curbing urban sprawl, with the passage of the Greenbelt Act, 2005.
- Created the Greenbelt Foundation to help preserve the natural heritage, protect prime agricultural land and support many recreational opportunities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The foundation received a one-time grant of $25 million from the province.
- Revised the Provincial Policy Statement to better embody good planning practices and better recognize the complex relationships among economic, environmental and social factors in land-use planning. These revisions reflect the advice of the Agricultural Advisory Team regarding the long-term protection of the province's agricultural resources.
- Proposed revisions, under advice from the Agricultural Advisory Team, to the Minimum Distance Separation Formulae, a land-use planning tool used to identify appropriate setbacks between livestock operations and other land uses to reduce conflicts related to odour.

HAWKESBURY LAGOON CLEAN-UP

The remediation of Hawkesbury's wet lagoon is an important first step in revitalizing a key waterfront property located in the central core of the town. The government is protecting the environment and the health of residents by investing $280,000 in the first phase of the clean-up, through ReNew Ontario. The post-construction site will provide green space for the use and enjoyment of the citizens of Hawkesbury.

The Natural Spaces Program enhances the tools available for projects that protect natural heritage and restore lands and forests in southern Ontario.

- Encouraged landowners to voluntarily contribute to good stewardship of southern Ontario's rich natural heritage through the Natural Spaces Program in conjunction with the Natural Spaces Leadership Alliance. To help secure lands, the program provided a $6-million grant to the Ontario Heritage Trust, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, to acquire significant natural heritage properties. The program also supports increased restoration of our lands and forests with a $2-million grant to the Trees Ontario Foundation.
- Contributed to sound land-use planning and forestry development initiatives by providing a one-time $2-million grant to the Forestry Futures Trust. Eligible First Nations may apply for assistance for projects such as data collection and analysis, collection and mapping of native traditional knowledge, business planning and feasibility studies.
- Encouraged property owners to rehabilitate eligible brownfields by making it possible for municipalities to provide these individuals with tax assistance, through the Brownfields Financial Tax Incentive Program. This initiative commits $5 million annually from 2004-05 through to 2007-08.

Brownfields are lands on which industrial or commercial activity took place in the past.

CHATHAM-KENT BROWNFIELD AND BLUEFIELD STRATEGY

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent earned a Brownie Award from the Canadian Urban Institute for its strategy to overcome the key disincentives to the redevelopment of brownfield and bluefield (unused institutional or community facilities) sites. The province granted approval for its Community Improvement Plan allowing the municipality to provide incentives that will encourage the rehabilitation and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized industrial and institutional sites.

SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

Our plan for rural Ontario recognizes that when young people have access to good education in local schools, our communities can grow stronger.

The role of the school in rural communities is larger than providing essential education. More often than not, the school is the heart of the community – offering classes by day and community activities by night.

That's why we are working so hard to address the special challenges facing rural schools – staffing, programming and infrastructure. The government will improve the viability of rural high schools, increase graduation rates and encourage more rural students to pursue postsecondary education. We're putting rural high schools on an equal footing with their urban counterparts. Our goal is not only to ensure the viability of rural schools but also to improve access to the tools and resources that make learning a life-long experience.

QUALITY EDUCATION

Through the Rural Plan, we are successfully meeting those challenges. We are investing in rural schools. We are making sure that our 300,000 rural students have an equal opportunity for a quality education. We are keeping more doors open for community needs. And we are increasing the opportunities for skills training to help build a stronger future.

GOAL:
Quality education close to home

STRATEGIES:
- → Respond to the needs of rural schools
- → Provide opportunities for access to education and information resources
- → Develop a comprehensive early learning and child-care plan
- → Increase access to schools for community groups

OUR PROGRESS:
- Strengthening the viability of rural schools and allowing school boards the flexibility to use funding in ways they believe will best enhance programs and services through the Keeping Good Schools Open Initiative. Building on the $31-million commitment in 2004-05 for Keeping Good Schools Open, funding will be provided in 2005-06 in recognition of the costs of operating rural schools. These enhancements total $20 million, bringing the government's investment in this initiative to more than $50 million. This initiative will provide funding to 1,139 rural schools.

There are 144 rural high schools serving more than 75,000 students.

- Committed, through the Rural Student Success Program, to provide $10 million in additional funding to 25 to 50 rural high schools for a two-year period to increase their viability, to adapt the high school curriculum to emphasize the rural experience and deliver a $3.5 million provincial e-learning platform and pilot program to provide rural students access to a range of courses and resources that were previously unavailable.

RURAL STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM

The Rural Student Success Program customizes Ontario's high school strategy for rural students. It will improve the viability of rural high schools, increase graduation rates and encourage more rural students to pursue postsecondary education.

"The Rural Student Success Program released by Education Minister Gerard Kennedy demonstrates fresh thinking and flexible strategies that enhance and expand the educational programming offered in small, rural high schools, ensuring the students' well-being." Grace McGartland, Chair, Coalition for Small Schools

- Recognized the renewal needs of Ontario's schools through the Good Places to Learn program. This initiative has given rural schools funding to address $170 million worth of renewal needs, including new roofs, boilers, windows and other enhancements.
- Assisted rural schools to become more energy efficient with $6.3 million in grants.
- Adjusted the funding formula to recognize the higher costs of building new additions and schools in rural and remote areas. More than $2 million is allocated annually, leveraging more than $30 million worth of repairs, renewal and school additions.

More than 60 per cent of rural students take a school bus every day.

- Improved student transportation with additional funding. In 2004-05 and 2005-06, we allocated an additional total amount of $21 million for rural student transportation.
- Provided $700,000 in start-up funding to support the public library component of the Ontario Digital Library (ODL) initiative. Once implemented, the ODL will be a province-wide library of electronic resources and services, which will enable better access to information and resources to libraries including those in rural and remote communities, including First Nations communities.
- Worked with the Organization of Book Publishers of Ontario and First Nation librarians to assist 50 First Nation public libraries acquire books on topics of interest for First Nation communities. The government provided $20,000.
- Provided funding directly to school libraries to replenish their resources and allocated $4 million of that funding to ensure that small schools receive the same amount as their larger counterparts.

THE BEST START PLAN

Lambton/Chatham-Kent is one of three demonstration sites to implement the Best Start vision. This program integrates and improves access to local services and supports for children and their parents, which helps build stronger communities.

The Best Start Plan provides for the healthy development, early learning and child care of children in their first years.

- Extended relief from cost-sharing requirements to municipalities on $1.1 billion worth of federal funding for Ontario's Best Start Plan. This is especially important in rural communities where funding their share of program and administration costs can be challenging. In 2005-06, the provincial government announced it would waive the cost-share provisions on the new funding for the life of the federal agreements.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS IN TRILLIUM LAKELANDS

In January, 2005, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board signed a Community Use of Schools Agreement to receive $185,802 to help make school facilities more accessible to not-for-profit groups at reduced rates. Improvements made from this funding included:

- Rental fees for not-for-profit groups serving children and youth were reduced to zero
- Hourly fees for school facilities such as classrooms and gyms were reduced to zero
- The hourly custodian fee that had been charged on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays was reduced for all community not-for-profit groups
- Single and mulit-use administration fees were waived for all community not-for-profit groups
- Facilities were made available to community not-for-profit groups for an additional 5,000 hours a year.

The Community Use of Schools program provides District School Boards with up to $20 million to cover the incremental costs of community use of school facilities. The current program is continuing in 2005-06.

- In the 2004-05 school year, all of Ontario's 72 district school boards signed Community Recreation and Use Agreements.

ONTARIO'S RURAL PLAN

TOGETHER, WE HAVE DONE MUCH ... TOGETHER, WE WILL DO MORE

The Government of Ontario is pleased to present this update, and to share with you how far we have come on the route to stronger rural communities that we mapped out together.

We care about the people who live and work in rural Ontario. We recognize the special qualities that rural communities possess as well as the unique challenges they face.

Ontario's Rural Plan is a living document – one that will change and grow based on the needs and feedback of our rural citizens. It encourages all partners to get involved and seek solutions that will improve fundamental services and quality of life. It helps us to explore new opportunities that will lead to thriving and prosperous rural communities.

Ontario's Rural Plan is working. We are making progress in addressing the challenges. And we are making the most of the many strengths of rural Ontario by working together for success.

We have made a long-term commitment to work with rural residents, community groups, businesses and municipalities to address significant issues and bring real change.

We're confident that, by working in partnership, we will build even stronger, more vital rural communities. We invite you all to join us.

For more information about Ontario's Rural Plan contact:

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